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NOTES ET DOCUMENTS

SOME ACCOUNTS OF WOMEN DELEGATES TO CALIPH MUʿĀWIYA: POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE*

BY

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From the ninth century onwards, there circulated in Islamic literature accounts of women delegates approaching different rulers about various issues. These accounts frequently disclose the wit and audacity of the women delegates as they carried on their missions. Many accounts are preserved in collections of belles-lettres immortalizing the creative eloquence and poetic excellence of these women delegates.

These accounts recall what we know of women in the first Islamic century: that they played an important political role. Due to the culturally inherent disgrace associated with punishing women for anything but moral infractions, they were exempt from many rules of expression that applied to men. They were, therefore, thought to be best suited to carry out delicate missions that involved a degree of opposition or resistance to the reigning authorities. They were often charged with the role of approaching a ruler, conveying complaints, demands and requests, or took it upon themselves to engage in this activity.

Of the accounts beginning to circulate in the ninth century, by far the most noteworthy are the delegations of ʿAlid women to Caliph Muʿāwiya. This ruler came to power following a period of civil strife during which he challenged the right of his predecessor ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. The major military confrontation between the two men occurred at the inconclusive Battle of Ṣiffīn that ended with a much-contested arbitration agreement. As was the custom on Arab battlefields, this battle was one of words as much as one of swords. Poets and poetesses on both sides recited verses to inflame the fighters, all proclaiming the righteousness and merits of the candidate they supported. Many a person achieved fame for having recited a few lines of poetry on this occasion. A number of women are said to have been among this fateful battle's most avid pro-ʿAlid supporters.

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This article deals with accounts of these women, especially their alleged subsequent encounters with Caliph Muʿāwiya, their former enemy, who had by then become their new ruler. It studies the accounts of these women in both Sunni and Shiʿi literary and biographical works. It focuses on three main issues. First, it shows how these accounts testify to the important political missions which women were still capable of undertaking in that period. These missions tell us much of a time when restrictions on the freedom and movement of women were not yet in place, and the notion that they should be neither seen nor heard was still alien to the culture. Second, it discusses the way in which these accounts elaborate on the theme/topos of Muʿāwiya's forbearance (Ar. *ḥilm*) and illustrate the comparable virtues of both Muʿāwiya and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.[1] Third, it treats the consequent usage of these accounts as historiographical tools that aimed to reformulate the image of the historical leaders of the Sunni community. This article will suggest that, in the process of extolling the *ḥilm* of Muʿāwiya, these accounts achieve two purposes. They both establish the legitimacy of Muʿāwiya's own leadership and re-evaluate the qualities of Muʿāwiya's predecessor, thereby rehabilitating ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib within Umayyad history.

The women visiting Caliph Muʿāwiya are referred to in our sources as "the delegates" (Ar. *al-wāfidāt*, sing. *al-wāfida*) and it is only in this role that these women are discussed. What seems to have been mostly forgotten in almost all the sources is the actual participation of these women in the Battle of Ṣiffīn. We derive these accounts from two kinds of sources. First, they are found in compilations of poetry and belles-lettres dating from the ninth century and after. Second, they appear in Sunni and Shiʿi biographical dictionaries where they constitute the substance of the entries on some of these women, representing them in their role of delegates to Muʿāwiya and in no other context.

The Wāfidāt *Accounts: Historical Authenticity*

In treating the *wāfidāt* accounts, we need to ask: are they authentic, truly depicting historical facts? Or are they literary tropes invented to illustrate a point? It is impossible to establish the historicity of the *wāfidāt* accounts. On the one hand, the relative absence of any solid historical data on these specific women delegates lends

[1] On the importance of the concept of *ḥilm* in Arabian society during the pre-Islamic and Islamic times, see Charles Pellat, *Risāla fī l-ḥilm ʿinda l-ʿArab* (Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-Ǧadīd, 1973). Pellat refers to the difficulty of defining the concept of *ḥilm*, and to the variance in the characteristics associated with *ḥilm* over time. However, while recognizing the association of Muʿāwiya with the concept of *ḥilm*, he explains that Muʿāwiya's *ḥilm* was understood in a particular sense, namely the sense of political cleverness (*al-dahā' al-siyāsī*) propagated by Henri Lammens. Pellat recognizes as well that this particular sense was often mistakenly taken to designate *ḥilm* in the absolute, in Charles Pellat, *Risāla fī l-ḥilm*, 83, 110-112, 112-117 and 119. The topos about Muʿāwiya's *ḥilm* is very well illustrated in the literature. See, for example, the numerous wise sayings attributed to Muʿāwiya in Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's "*Risālat al-ḥilm*" in ʿAbdallah b. Muḥammad Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Mawsūʿat Rasā'il Ibn Abī l-Dunyā*, ed. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut, Mu'assasat al-kutub al-ṭaqāfiyya, 1992), 3:27-28, 33-34, 37-38, 40 and 61.

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support to the idea that they may have been simply literary creations. On the other hand, in general, there is little historical data on women of the early period and even less information on non-Qurayši women or on women who were not closely related (through blood or marriage) to the Prophet or to the early Companions. The absence of historical data on these women, therefore, may not be proof that they did not exist. They may well have been ʿAlid supporters. Many of them, as their names will indicate, presumably hailed from Kufa that had been the major center of ʿAlid support. What is harder to establish is whether they had actually participated in the Battle of Ṣiffīn and whether they had ever visited Muʿāwiya in their capacity as *wāfidāt*, thus authenticating the accounts about their encounters with him.

Whether historical documents or literary tropes, we can see that these accounts provide us with important information. First, they describe behavior that was apparently seen as remarkable, perhaps even daring, and nonetheless to a large degree, acceptable at the time of these accounts' earliest circulation. Second, if they do not accurately depict the reign of Muʿāwiya, they nonetheless tell us much about the later historical perception of his reign.

The Wāfidāt *Accounts: General Nature*

The accounts speak of at least sixteen different women who went to see Muʿāwiya during his caliphate. Some of them presumably came and requested an audience. Others are said to have been summoned by Muʿāwiya. More than half of these women were declared supporters of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib who asserted or admitted their attachment to him in the course of their encounter with Muʿāwiya. All of these ʿAlid women are described in the sources as having been actively involved at the Battle of Ṣiffīn. There they recited poetry or gave orations encouraging those fighting at the side of ʿAlī, and attacking, with bitter words, the camp of Muʿāwiya and his supporters. During Muʿāwiya's encounters with many of the women, these verses or orations are referred to and recited.[2] It is Muʿāwiya himself or his courtiers who often challenge the *wāfidāt* into revealing or re-asserting their ʿAlid tendencies during the Caliph's deliberations with them. Furthermore, the accounts imply that the fame of the women relies heavily, if not solely, on the verses and orations that they are said to have composed and recited at the Battle of Ṣiffīn.

If the poetic and oratorical exploits of these women at the Battle of Ṣiffīn made them famous, one might expect that at least some of them, or their verses and orations, would be included in the accounts of the battle itself. Surprisingly, however, they are absent from all major historical accounts of Ṣiffīn, and even from

[2] Ğarwa bt. Murra b. Ġālib al-Tamīmiyya and Āmina bt. al-Šarīd are exceptions. Although Ğarwa bt. Murra admitted to her attachment to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib during her encounter with the new Caliph, her interaction with Muʿāwiya did not include any reference to the Battle of Ṣiffīn per se. As to Āmina bt. al-Šarīd, her explosive interaction with Muʿāwiya occurred after the death of her husband ʿAmr b. al-Ḥamiq al-Ḫuzāʿī at the hands of Muʿāwiya's men, and focused mainly on her reaction to that event.

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the most elaborate account of the battle authored by Ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī.[3] The one exception is Ibn Aʿṯam al-Kūfī's *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* in which three of these women are mentioned. Al-Kūfī treats them in two ways. First, he describes the presence of some of them at the Battle of Ṣiffīn and the role that two of them played in encouraging the ʿAlid fighters at the battle.[4] Second, he refers to them in their capacity as *wāfidāt*, and speaks of the meeting of three of them with the Caliph Muʿāwiya.[5] We must remember, however, that Ibn Aʿṯam's account of the *wāfidāt*'s encounters with Muʿāwiya could possibly be a projection backwards of the accounts of these encounters onto the historical narrative itself. This projection could certainly be true considering that Ibn Aʿṯam al-Kūfī was writing in the early tenth century, while accounts about these encounters existed in the literature from at least half a century earlier.

Literary accounts of delegations of the supporters of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib to Muʿāwiya are not restricted to women. There are parallel delegations of ʿAlid men who came to see Muʿāwiya for various reasons. The accounts of women, however, deserve special attention for two reasons. First, unlike the men's encounters with Muʿāwiya which seem to represent only one episode in their lives and only part of the larger body of information we have about them, the women's encounters with the Caliph are their one and only claim to fame. Second, these accounts reveal the kind of political action and maneuvering that women were still capable of undertaking during the early Umayyad period.[6]

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[3] They are absent from the accounts of al-Ṭabarī, al-Dīnawarī, al-Balāḏurī, al-Masʿūdī, al-Yaʿqūbī, Ibn al-Aṯīr and Ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī, as well as from the modern compilation of Muḥsin al-Amīn. This is so, even though Ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī includes in his account verses by other women, such as Ḥabla bt. Manṣūr's elegy of her brother al-Aġlaḥ b. Manṣūr al-Kindī, a poem by an anonymous Syrian woman, as well as Ḍubayʿa bt. Ḫuzayma b. Ṯābit's elegy of her father and Amīna l-Anṣāriyya's elegy of Mālik b. Tayhān, in Naṣr b. Muzāḥim al-Minqarī, *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Qom, Manšūrāt maktabat āyat Allāh al-ʿuẓmā al-marʿašī al-naǧafī, 1962), 178, 357, and 365. Al-Amīn also reproduced Ḥabla and Ḍubayʿa's elegies in his account of the Battle of Ṣiffīn while mentioning none of the women delegates, in Muḥsin al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-šīʿa*, ed. Ḥasan al-Amīn (Beirut, Dār al-taʿāruf li-l-maṭbūʿāt, 1986), 1:481, 498. Moreover, al-Masʿūdī also included in his account of the Battle of Ṣiffīn an elegy by an anonymous Iraqi woman for her three deceased sons while mentioning no other women poets, in ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī, *Murūǧ al-ḏahab wa maʿādin al-ǧawhar*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī l-dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Egypt, Maṭbaʿat al-saʿāda, 1948), 2:405.

[4] These are al-Zarqāʾ bt. ʿAdī l-Hamdāniyya and Umm Sinān al-Maḏḥiǧiyya. For the accounts of al-Zarqāʾ and Umm Sinān's roles at Ṣiffīn, see Ibn Aʿṯam al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (Hyderabad, Osmania University, 1970), 3:141-142 and 3:100-101.

[5] For the accounts of each of al-Zarqāʾ bt. ʿAdī l-Hamdāniyya, Umm Sinān and Sawda bt. ʿAmāra's encounters with Muʿāwiya, see respectively al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, 3:142-145; 3:101-105 and 3:89-93.

[6] The task of investigating the political role of women in early Islam has its own history. Perhaps the oldest articles dealing with this topic are those written by Nabia Abbott and published in the early 1940's. See Nabia Abbott, "Women and the State in Early Islam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 1:1 (January 1942): 106-126 and "Women and

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By examining the available reports about the *wāfidāt*, we can perhaps discern prevailing attitudes towards women, not only in the mid-seventh century, at the time of their alleged occurrence, but also at the time of their first circulation in the ninth century. This is so because these accounts purport to detail historical facts relating to the attitudes of the women delegates towards Muʿāwiya, the demands they expressed in his presence and also the dynamics of their interaction with him. That these represent a true depiction of the reign of Muʿāwiya has not been questioned by later Muslim biographical and literary sources which tend to accept them as authentic and reproduce them as such, sometimes with little or no variation. The fact that many of these accounts survived in some of the later biographical dictionaries rather than merely in the realm of belles-lettres adds credence to this assumed authenticity and historicity assigned to them on the part of those who continued to transmit them.

The Wāfidāt *Accounts: Details*

In this article I will focus on the *wāfidāt* mentioned in the widest array of sources. The accounts tell us that they came to see Muʿāwiya for different reasons. No matter why they came, these women were bold enough to say what was on their minds. They did not hide their political preferences from the new Caliph. They capitalized on the fact that they were testing his suitability as a Caliph by examining how he approached his old political opponents and responded to their needs and demands now that he had become the ruler and they had become his subjects.

Some women came to the Caliph in order to express personal grievances or to act as spokespersons for their relatives or tribes. In most of these cases, the complaints were about the ill-treatment they received from governors appointed by Muʿāwiya to their regions. Umm Sinān bt. Ḥayṭama,[7] for example, came to see the Caliph to obtain the release of her grandson, imprisoned by Marwān b. al-Ḥakam in Medina.[8] Recalling her fierce attacks against him at the Battle of Ṣiffīn,

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the State in Early Islam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 1:3 (July 1942): 341-368. The second article is particularly relevant because it covers the role of women during the Umayyad period. Unfortunately Abbott's concentration is on women associated with the Umayyad household and the role they played with relation to their husbands or relatives who occupied positions of power within the Umayyad court.

[7] See the accounts about Umm Sinān bt. Ḥayṭama in Ibn Aʿṯam al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, 3:100-105; al-ʿAbbās b. Bakkār al-Ḍabbī, *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt min al-nisāʾ ʿalā Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān*, ed. Sukayna Šihābī (Beirut, 1983), 23-26; Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Balāġāt al-nisāʾ* (Beirut, Dār al-ḥadāṯa, 1987), 92-94; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, (Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-istiqāma, 1940), 1:331-333; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīḫ madīnat Dimašq (Tarāǧīm al-nisāʾ)*, ed. Sukayna Šihābī (Damascus, 1982), 530-532; al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿšā fī ṣināʿat al-inšāʾ*, (n.p.:n.d.), 1:257-259; Muḥsin al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-šīʿa*, 3:480; ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Māliqī, *al-Ḥadāʾiq al-ġannāʾ fī aḫbār al-nisāʾ*, ed. ʿĀʾida l-Ṭībī (Lybia/Tunisia, al-Dār al-ʿarabiyya li-l-kitāb, 1978), 81-83.

[8] Marwān b. al-Ḥakam was appointed to the governorship of Medina from 42 A.H. (662/663 C.E.) to 49 A.H. (669/670 C.E.) and again from 54 A.H. (673/674 C.E.) to

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Muʿāwiya asks her: "What brings you to my region, after I was used to you cursing me and encouraging my enemies against me?"[9]

Sensing the sarcasm in this question, Umm Sinān, taking the defensive, cleverly answers Muʿāwiya. She subtly praises him; she shames him for reveling in the power he now has over her; she reminds him, by appealing to his sense of dignity, that he comes from an honorable clan renowned for the sagacity of its members. "The Banū ʿAbd Manāf", she adds, "do not feign ignorance when they have knowledge, they are not insolent after they have shown clemency, and they do not seek revenge after they have forgiven."[10] She then suggests that he should be the first to follow his ancestors' example.

Admitting that she is right, Muʿāwiya nonetheless reminds her of the pro-ʿAlid poetry that she composed at Ṣiffīn by reciting it himself.[11] She responds by reasserting ʿAlī's excellence, and wishing that Muʿāwiya would be a worthy successor. Then she reveals the object of her visit by recounting to Muʿāwiya the insults she had incurred from Marwān b. al-Ḥakam. Muʿāwiya, impressed by her courage and directness, grants her grandson an instant pardon without even asking about his crime. Umm Sinān, obviously pleased by the outcome of the encounter, is bold enough to ask for provisions and a new camel to make the trip home. Muʿāwiya grants her request.

A slightly different situation occurs when Sawda bt. ʿAmāra comes to see Muʿāwiya with a somewhat similar objective.[12] She wishes to complain about the despotic behavior of Ibn Arṭāt,[13] the governor whom Muʿāwiya had appointed to her region.

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57 or 58 A.H. (676/677 or 677/678 C.E.) It is not clear when his encounter with Umm Sinān bt. Ḫayṭama took place. See Muḥammad b. Ǧarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīḫ al-rusul wa l-mulūk* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1879), 7:16, 86, 164, 180-181; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Beirut, Dār Bayrūt, n.d.), 5:38 and Šams al-Dīn al-Ḏahabī, *Taʾrīḫ al-Islām wa wafayāt al-mašāhīr wa l-aʿlām* (Beirut, Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 1990), 5:231.

[9] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 1:331.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Ibn Aʿṯam al-Kūfī mentions that Muʿāwiya had personally heard Umm Sinān during the Battle of Ṣiffīn encouraging her clan members, Banū Maḏḥiǧ, to fight with ʿAlī against Muʿāwiya, in Ibn Aʿṯam al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, 3:101.

[12] The accounts of Sawda bt. ʿAmāra's encounter with Muʿāwiya appear in Ibn Aʿṯam al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, 3:89-93; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 1:325-328; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīḫ madīnat Dimašq*, 178-180; al-Ḍabbī, *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt*, 67-70; and Zaynab al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Durr al-manṯūr fī ṭabaqāt rabbāt al-ḫudūr* (Beirut, Dār al-maʿrifa, 1970), 253-254.

[13] Busr b. Arṭāt, better known as Busr b. Abī Arṭāt, was a fervent supporter of Muʿāwiya who belonged to the clan of ʿĀmir of the tribe of Qurayš. He fought for Muʿāwiya at the Battle of Ṣiffīn. After that, towards the beginning of 40 A.H. (660/661 C.E.), Muʿāwiya sent Busr on a mission to Medina, Mecca and Yemen. On this mission, Busr is said to have committed many violent acts, including the killing, in Medina and Yemen, of many of the supporters of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and of anyone who was rumored to have participated in the murder of Caliph ʿUṯmān, as well as the killing of two of the sons of ʿUbaydallah b. al-ʿAbbās. See al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīḫ al-rusul wa l-mulūk*, 7:11, 22; Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā l-Balāḏurī, *Ansāb al-ašrāf*, ed. Max Schloessinger, rev. &

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As soon as she enters his court, the Caliph questions her about the pro-ʿAlid poetry that she recited at Ṣiffīn. Sawda, admitting that she composed the verses, declares that her love for ʿAlī and the pursuit of justice inspired her.[14] When asked about the object of her visit, she describes the atrocities that Ibn Arṭāt inflicted on her pro-ʿAlid clan, the Banū Hamdān, by killing their men and depriving them of their property. Then, addressing Muʿāwiya, she defiantly concludes: "Were we not obedient, we would be forceful and insurgent. Dismiss him and we shall thank you. If not, we will know you for what you are."[15] Then, after reciting a few verses in praise of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib's sense of justice, she tells Muʿāwiya about a similar encounter she had had with ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib during his caliphate. She describes how ʿAlī listened to her and then complied with her request, thus calling upon Muʿāwiya to do the same. The comparison with ʿAlī seemingly prompts Muʿāwiya to action. He verbally and actively recognizes the qualities of ʿAlī by following his example.[16]

Likewise, ʿAkraša bt. al-Aṭraš[17] comes to see Muʿāwiya for a similar purpose. She does not hide from him her preference for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, but admits that she had come to accept Muʿāwiya because ʿAlī is no longer alive. She attacks in a daring way the unjust work of Muʿāwiya's appointees but implies that she has high expectations with regard to Muʿāwiya's kindness and fairness. Impressed with her cleverness and directness, and asserting that her audacious behavior is the result of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib's legacy of showing justice to his people, Muʿāwiya complies with her demands.[18] In this encounter, as in many others, the praise of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib is very apparent. Muʿāwiya himself is once again made to acknowledge ʿAlī's fairness, if not his political shrewdness. He is called on to acknowledge his predecessor's legacy in both word and deed.

In other accounts, we are told that at times Muʿāwiya was himself interested in meeting old opponents, taking the initiative to call for them. This was allegedly

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ann. M.J. Kister (Jerusalem, The Hebrew University, 1971), 4A:165-166; Šams al-Dīn al-Ḏahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad al-ʿArqūsī and Maʾmūn Ṣāġarǧī (Beirut, Muʾassasat al-risāla, 1985), 3: 409-411 and his *Taʾrīḫ al-Islām*, 5:369; as well as Ibn Ḥaǧar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahḏīb al-tahḏīb* (Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 1:436.

[14] Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Balāġāt al-nisāʾ*, 44.

[15] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 1:326.

[16] As a response to her urging him to follow the example of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, Muʿāwiya is said to have declared: "*Laqad lammazakum Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-ǧurʾa ʿalā al-sulṭān fa-baṭīʾan mā tufṭamūn*" (Ibn Abī Ṭālib has given you a taste of what it is like to be daring with a ruler, it will take long for you to be weaned) in Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Balāġāt al-nisāʾ*, 46.

[17] Also known as ʿAkraša bt. al-Aṭaš. For the accounts about her see al-Ḍabbī, *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt*, 37-39; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīḫ madīnat Dimašq*, 254-255; Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Balāġāt al-nisāʾ*, 104-105; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 1:333-335.

[18] Muʿāwiya is said to have exclaimed: "*Ḥayhāta yā ahla al-ʿIrāq! laqad faqqahakum ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib fa-lan tuṭāqū*" (Oh you people of Iraq! ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib has taught you well that one can no longer control you!) in al-Ḍabbī, *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt*, 39.

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the case of his meetings with Umm al-Ḫayr bt. al-Ḥurayš[19] and al-Zarqāʾ bt. ʿAdī.[20] In both cases, Muʿāwiya seems to have been so impressed by the sincerity of these women, their fearlessness and their continued loyalty to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib that he showed great generosity towards them despite the fact that they had been his most passionate opponents, who continued to avow their dissatisfaction with him.

Encounters with the Caliph did not always succeed and lead to a settlement pleasing to both parties. Sometimes, they generated great tension and seriously jeopardized the possibilities of reconciliation. This occurred during Muʿāwiya's encounter with each of Arwā bt. al-Ḥāriṯ b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib,[21] Bakāra al-Hilāliyya[22] and Umm al-Barāʾ bt. Ṣafwān.[23] All three women took the initiative of coming to see the new ruler, but soon realized that they could not recognize him in this role nor accept his help. Arwā bt. al-Ḥāriṯ b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib expresses great anger with Muʿāwiya and then leaves without stating the object of her visit. When Bakāra al-Hilāliyya is insulted by Muʿāwiya's advisors, she rejects Muʿāwiya's offer of help and leaves.[24] Umm al-Barāʾ bt. Ṣafwān, sensing some hostility on being reminded of her anti-Umayyad poetry at Ṣiffīn, also refuses to tell Muʿāwiya why she had come to see him and departs from his court, reminiscing about the time of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.

The Wāfidāt *Accounts: One Possible Purpose*

In view of the outcome of some of these encounters, it may be difficult to assert confidently that they were aimed at improving the image of Muʿāwiya and estab-

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[19] For the accounts about Umm al-Ḫayr bt. al-Ḥurayš, see Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 1:337-341; Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Balāġāt al-nisāʾ*, 53-57; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīḫ madīnat Dimašq*, 512-516; al-Ḍabbī, *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt*, 27-32; al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-šīʿa*, 3:476-477, al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Durr al-manṯūr*, 57-58; Šihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab* (Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-kutub al-miṣriyya, 1929), 7:241-243.

[20] For the accounts about al-Zarqāʾ bt. ʿAdī, see Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 1:329-331; Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Balāġāt al-nisāʾ*, 47-49; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīḫ madīnat Dimašq*, 109-111; al-Ḍabbī, *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt*, 63-66; al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-šīʿa*, 7:60; al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Durr al-manṯūr*, 231.

[21] For the accounts about Arwā bt. al-Ḥāriṯ b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, see Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 1:341-343; al-Ḍabbī, *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt*, 47-51; al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-šīʿa*, 3:245.

[22] For the accounts about Bakāra al-Hilāliyya, see al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-šīʿa*, 3:589; al-Ḍabbī, *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt*, 71-72; al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Durr al-manṯūr*, 99-100; Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Balāġāt al-nisāʾ*, 50-52; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 1:328-329.

[23] For the accounts about Umm al-Barāʾ bt. Ṣafwān, see Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Balāġāt al-nisāʾ*, 111-112; al-Māliqī, *al-Ḥadāʾiq al-ġannāʾ*, 74-75; al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿšā*, 1:261; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīḫ madīnat Dimašq*, 478-479; al-Ḍabbī, *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt*, 44-46; al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-šīʿa*, 3:475.

[24] Ibn Ṭayfūr offers two versions of this encounter. These two versions are similar except for the ending. In the other version of the story, it is said that, after the bitter attacks of his advisors, Muʿāwiya honored the requests of Bakāra and sent her home satisfied. Ibn Ṭayfūr is the only source that mentions this version of the event, and this version seems unlikely in view of the earlier part of the story.

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lishing his *ḥilm*. Nevertheless, two elements tend to support that this could be an important purpose of these accounts.

The first has to do with the way these accounts might have been read and understood by ideological opponents of the Umayyads. Although it is virtually impossible to find information about these women in any Shiʿi source prior to the nineteenth century,[25] Muḥsin al-Amīn, author of the monumentous compilation *Aʿyān al-šīʿa*, seems to have encountered the same difficulty. All the information that he mentions about these women is taken directly from *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt min al-nisāʾ ʿalā Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān* by al-ʿAbbās b. Bakkār al-Ḍabbī, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd* by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi and Ibn Ṭayfūr's *Balāġāt al-nisāʾ*. Moreover, he gives no information about these women beyond their encounters with Muʿāwiya. Yet it is interesting to observe how he treats these stories and what he says about them.

Al-Amīn reproduces these accounts as they appeared in *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt, al-ʿIqd al-farīd* and *Balāġāt al-nisāʾ*. Although, in some cases, he chooses not to comment on them, at other times, he adds his commentary at the end of the narratives. His tone is unmistakable and his statement is clear. Al-Amīn sees the purpose of these encounters to be twofold: as a means for Muʿāwiya to humiliate weaker opponents; and as a method of demonstrating his clemency (*ḥilm*) in the case of people who did not fear him, or people whose tribal power he feared.[26]

The second element that tends to support this interpretation lies in the structure of the accounts themselves. We see in them a distinct tendency to contrast the behavior of Muʿāwiya with that of his aides. The wisdom of the Caliph is set against the foolishness and cruelty of the advisors. This is apparent in the case of al-Zarqāʾ bt. ʿAdī. When she is first mentioned at his court, his advisors suggest killing her for having attacked Muʿāwiya in her poetry at Ṣiffīn. He, wise enough to resist such a suggestion, sends for her and has her brought to him with a sizable cortege.[27]

In other accounts as well, Muʿāwiya is represented as resorting to the use of *ḥilm* because he believes that it is the duty of a good ruler to do so. In the story of his meeting with Dārimiyya al-Ḥaǧūniyya,[28] Muʿāwiya asks her whether the gift of one-hundred she-camels, which she had requested, would equate him in her heart to ʿAlī. She responds negatively. Muʿāwiya, nevertheless, honors her request on the basis that, if he were not to show *ḥilm*, who else would?[29]

It becomes apparent, therefore, that the literary and rhetorical value of these

[25] Except for the brief mention in Ibn Aʿṯam al-Kūfī's *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* discussed earlier in this article.

[26] al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-šīʿa*, 3:477; 6:364; and 7:60.

[27] Muʿāwiya responds to his advisors' suggestion saying: "*biʾsa mā ašartum ʿalayyā bihi, ayaḥsunu bi-miṯlī an yataḥaddaṯa al-nāsu annī qataltu imraʾatan baʿda mā malaktu wa ṣāra al-amru lī*" (What a wretched thing to suggest to me. Is it befitting me for people to say that I murdered a woman after I became the ruler and the Caliph in charge?) in al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-šīʿa*, 7:60; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīḫ madīnat Dimašq*, 110.

[28] For the accounts about Dārimiyya al-Ḥaǧūniyya see Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 1:335-337; Ibn Ṭayfūr, *Balāġāt al-nisāʾ*, 106-107; al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Durr al-manṯūr*, 189-190; al-Ḍabbī, *Aḫbār al-wāfidāt*, 40-43; al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿšā*, 1:259-260.

[29] al-Qalqašandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿšā*, 1:260.

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accounts is rivaled by their propagandist aim. The depictions in the sources often seem to focus on these women's encounters with Muʿāwiya as providing positive images of Muʿāwiya himself.[30] It thus seems as though these accounts were used as historiographical tools designed to bring out and stress the wisdom of Muʿāwiya, and further reinforce the topos about him.

Yet despite the fact that the encounters are with Muʿāwiya, ʿAlī is omnipresent. This is so because the subtext of all these encounters invariably includes a praise of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. This praise does not mean to belittle Caliph Muʿāwiya, but, on the contrary, serves to enhance his reputation for wisdom. He himself is made to acknowledge the qualities of ʿAlī, and shrewdly to follow his example in dealing with the demands made upon him.

Although most of the sources are not Shiʿi, there is definitely a pro-ʿAlid tendency in all of these accounts. Naturally, this makes these texts even more complex because they manage to praise both ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Muʿāwiya, and seem to constitute an attempt on the part of their perpetrators to negotiate the debate about the issue of leadership of the Muslim community. Both ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Muʿāwiya are portrayed as exemplary leaders with comparable leadership qualities. These accounts also rehabilitate ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib within Umayyad memory, by having Muʿāwiya attest to his qualities and follow his example.

Why were these accounts perpetuated? Whether authentically portraying historical occurrences or not, their propagation may have been thought useful to the Umayyad regime. They could be considered perfect examples of the forbearance of the dynasty's founder, Muʿāwiya. The propagation of these accounts may have been encouraged by one of Muʿāwiya's own sayings: "I will not interfere with the tongues of my subjects so long as they do not interfere with my authority."[31] We know that, after the Umayyad takeover, despite the persistent existence of a strong pro-ʿAlid trend, the pro-ʿAlid partisans were more a nuisance than a real threat to the Umayyads. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib himself was dead and none of his immediate descendants were a threat after the massacre of al-Ḥusayn at Karbala. Thus ʿAlī's memory and his qualities of leadership could be referred to and used in order to promote new political ends. At the very least, his partisans could be allowed to

[30] The positive images of Muʿāwiya may be related to the appearance in the ninth century of a cult of Muʿāwiya in different parts of the empire as suggested by Lammens in Henri Lammens, "Le califat de Yazid 1^er^", 1-27 in *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale de Beyrouth*, 4 (1910): 233-259, certainly 246; Ḥabīb Zayyāt, "al-Tašayyuʿ li-Muʿāwiya fī ʿahd al-ʿabbāsiyyīn", *al-Mašriq*, 26 (1928): 410-415; and as developed by Pellat in Charles Pellat, "Le culte de Muʿāwiya au III^e^ siècle de l'hégire", *Studia Islamica*, 6 (1956): 53-66; and by Petersen in Erling Ladewig Petersen, "Studies on the Historiography of the ʿAlī-Muʿāwiyah Conflict", reprinted from *Acta Orientalia*, 27 (1963): 83-118 in E. Ladewig Petersen, *ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah in Early Arabic Tradition* (Odense, Odense University Press, 1974), certainly 109-118.

[31] Cited from Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's *Ḥilm Muʿāwiya* in James A. Bellamy, "Pro-Umayyad Propaganda in Ninth-Century Baghdad in the Works of Ibn Abī'l Dunyā," in *Prédications et propagande au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident*, ed. George Makdisi et al. (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1983): 71-86 (citation, 83).

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vent their dissatisfaction as long as they did not constitute any real threat to the Umayyad regime. Even if these accounts were not authentic, they would nonetheless have still constituted the ideal propaganda for the reign of Muʿāwiya and his dynasty.

It is true that these accounts can only be definitely interpreted as propaganda for the Umayyad regime, or for Muʿāwiya's reign in particular, if they can be shown to have begun to circulate during the reign of Muʿāwiya or during the lifetime of the dynasty. This we cannot prove and the question of the inception of these accounts is beyond the scope of this article. We can, however, strongly suggest that they had this purpose of propaganda.

The Wāfidāt *Accounts: Circulation*

Why would these accounts, whether authentic or not, whether originating in the Umayyad period or not, have circulated in the ninth and tenth century and beyond? The Umayyad dynasty had been ousted from power in 750 C.E. If these accounts originated during the reign of that dynasty and were intended to promote the quality of forbearance of its founder, why would they have survived and circulated past its life into the reign of the Umayyads' opponents and successors, the ʿAbbasids?

The answer to this question lies perhaps in the political conditions of early ʿAbbasid rule. The ʿAbbasids, descendants of an uncle of the Prophet, had come to power following a rebellion that overthrew the Umayyad dynasty in which they had participated while espousing vague Shiʿi claims, proclaiming to act on behalf of the "family of the Prophet". The definition of who represented this entity at this point was still unclear and, therefore, the access of the ʿAbbasids to power and their establishment of dynastic rule within the line of al-ʿAbbas frustrated many peoples' political hopes. Foremost among these were dissatisfied Shiʿi groups who had hoped that the overthrow of the Umayyads would result in the creation of a state more in line with their own ambitions. They wanted one led by a different group of the Prophet's kin, namely the descendants of the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. As these groups realized that their participation did not bear the fruit that they desired, and as Shiʿism as a separate sectarian identity further developed, many of those espousing Shiʿi ideas became extremists in the manner in which they expressed their opposition to the enemies of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and of his family: the Umayyads who had opposed them in the past, and the ʿAbbasids whom they thought had now usurped their right.

As these Shiʿi groups became more vocal, groups who disliked them emerged and they often advocated ideas framed in opposition to whatever the Shiʿi extremists were advocating. Many scholars, therefore, explain the cult of Muʿāwiya as being at least partially motivated by this antagonistic situation that was particularly difficult in the ʿAbbasid capital of Baghdad. Another relevant factor was the continued existence of groups that were genuine advocates of the Umayyads, who may have been further incensed by the attacks waged by the Shiʿi extremists against their Umayyad idols, and who also resorted to certain degrees of radical rhetoric in countering the attacks by the Shiʿi extremists.

We may consider, therefore, the propagation of the accounts about the *wāfidāt* during the ʿAbbasid period against this background. Following the bitter sectarian

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tensions of the ninth century, which characterized the early period of ʿAbbasid rule, when Shiʿi extremists, pro-Umayyad extremists and the ʿAbbasid authorities engaged in ideological bickering that often spilled into riots in the streets of Baghdad (then and certainly during the following century), more moderate points of view began to emerge in an attempt to bridge the differences among the disparate factions.

The continued circulation of the accounts about the *wāfidāt* may be viewed as part of this moderate kind of pro-Umayyad partisanship that co-existed with the extremist trends, and that could be labeled, following Michelangelo Guidi's example, a *tašayyuʿ ḥasan*.[32] This moderate pro-Umayyad partisanship would have attempted at "reconciliating opposing points of view."[33] Whereas the extremist groups represented Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib as opponents with each group attacking and pointing to the illegitimacy of their candidate's opponent, the perpetrators of the accounts about the *wāfidāt* perhaps strove to reconcile the two extremes by establishing the comparable legitimacy of both Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. The establishment of this legitimacy would have become even more urgent as the Sunni majority began to recognize itself as a separate community, partially defining its identity in opposition to the emerging Shiʿi sect. The situation, therefore, would have necessitated a look back upon its history in order to recast, in a more positive light, the roles played by its past leaders and to present a more harmonious communal lineage.

Recent scholarship has pointed to the existence of further examples of this reconciliatory trend in sources dating from the ninth century. It has observed the propagation of accounts that fed into and supported the ideals of an emerging Sunni orthodoxy that recognized the legitimacy of all earlier leaders of the community, the Umayyads included.[34] The *wāfidāt* accounts, therefore, can be read as part of this trend. By rehabilitating both Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, they present an alternative to the otherwise extremist partisan trends in existence at the time, the most important of which were the Shiʿi, pro-Umayyad and or pro-ʿAbbasid trends. These accounts portray both Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib as legitimate past representatives in the chain of recognized leaders of the Sunni community, a chain that needed to be established to counter the Shiʿi claims to its illegitimacy and to rival the neatly-structured emerging chain of imams proclaimed by the Shiʿis.[35]

Conclusion

That Muslim rulers gave audience to delegations from among their subjects is a fact attested for in various chronicles. What then makes the accounts about the

[32] See James A. Bellamy, "Pro-Umayyad Propaganda": 82.

[33] Petersen, *ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah in Early Arabic Tradition*, 110.

[34] See James A. Bellamy, "Pro-Umayyad Propaganda" and Tayeb El-Hibri, "The Redemption of Umayyad Memory by the ʿAbbāsids", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 61 no. 4 (2002): 241-265.

[35] See my article on the *ʿashara*, where the *ḥadīth* about the ten Companions promised paradise is used after the tenth century for very similar ends, in *Studia Islamica*, 86 (1997): 159-167.

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pro-ʿAlid *wāfidāt* visiting Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān so unique that they survived and circulated far beyond the time of these alleged meetings? The present article has attempted to answer this question by focusing on one possible answer. These accounts may have had the aim of publicizing the wisdom of the ruler or of upholding the image of his predecessor. Be it during the Umayyad period, or during the reign of the dynasty that supplanted them, this reconciliatory function may have answered urgent political needs. During the Umayyad period, it may have helped assuage pro-ʿAlid opponents, allowing for their controlled yet audible voice to be heard, as long as they did not seriously jeopardize the stability of the regime. During the reign of the following dynasty, the propagation of such accounts may have helped moderate the differences between the rival factions that arose after the ʿAbbasid takeover, allowing in time for the emergence of a notion of Sunni orthodoxy that recognized the contributions of all of the community's past leaders, including the Umayyads and the founder of their dynasty.

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